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ABSTRACT

This collection of guidelines and worksheets provides information on the development of good communication skills, aspects of interpersonal communications, and elements of administrator effectiveness in the field of education. Specifically mentioned are a public relations project; coping with rumors and grapevine information; social networking; identifying and informing the public; criteria for publications; guidelines for principals; personnel management; a suggested planning calendar; school newsletters; internal public relations; parent teacher conferences; mass media interviews; student discipline; telephone surveys; involving non-parents in the schools; improving school community relations; writing; staff morale; information dissemination; and a code of ethics. (DB)

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ED 405 794

Communicating With the Public

Judy Parker, ASPR
Kent School District

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WHO ARE OUR PUBLICS?

Internal	External
(Those groups of people within the family of education or directly associated with the school system, or a school building.)	(Those groups of people who are outside of the family or have indirect relationships with the school system, or a school building.)

Your Group's TOP Four Priority Publics (Consensus): _____

1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

Total Workshop Group's TOP Four Priority Publics (Consensus): _____

1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

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Things We're Doing Right

List those things your district/building is now doing that is right:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

9)

10)

What do our publics need to know about us?

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

9)

10)

Communication

Mass

Communications...Information

Letters
Lectures
Newsletters
Announcements
News Releases
News Conferences
Speeches
Films, Slide/Tape Presentations
Videotape Presentations
Books
Pamphlets
Brochures
Flyers
Guest Appearances
Memos
Overhead Transparency

Interpersonal

Involvement Communications...Attitudes

Discussions
Dialogues
Staff Conferences
Workshops
Seminars
Visits
Conventions
Parties
Team Projects
Open House/Reception
"Backgrounders" for media
Telephone Conversations
Caucuses
"Meetings after Meetings"
Barroom Conversation

communication briefings
806 Westminster Blvd., Blackwood, N.J. 08012

BONUS ITEM

Common Mistakes People Make When They Communicate

By Frank Grazian
Executive Editor

Here is a list of what we have found to be common communication mistakes people make. We do not mean to imply that these are the only errors made or that other types of errors should be ignored. But we have spotted these mistakes often enough to realize that they are both frequent and serious.

We hope the list will help you and your associates identify areas that will help you communicate more effectively.

■ **Failing to listen well.** Most people are poor listeners. Consider this question: Are you doing more than half the talking when you're in conference with others? If so, you're probably doing more talking than listening and could use some listening training.

Listening ties in closely with productivity, according to studies done at the former Sperry Corporation. So it pays to improve your listening skills.

Try these tips:

- **Paraphrase what** a speaker said to you to be sure you understand each other.
- **Become an** active listener. Concentrate on what the speaker says and try to summarize his or her main points.
- **Don't be** thrown off course by semantically loaded words that affect you emotionally. Continue listening even when you want to start arguing.

■ **Failing to use the "you approach."** We see many so-called persuasive communications that reflect a "we approach" instead of a "you approach." As a result, they often fail to do the job.

People are interested in what's in it for them—not what you or your organization desires. A "you approach" communicates to the recipient that you care about his or her needs. It sets a positive tone and predisposes the reader to react favorably toward what you have to say.

Some suggestions:

- **Communicate with** others as people—not simply as representatives of a firm or organization.
- **Try sincerely** to see things from the other person's point of view.
- **Avoid talking** about yourself and what you want or what you've done. Use the word "you" more often than "I."
- **When writing,** avoid sentences, such as: "We are certain that this approach is the best way . . ." Instead, write: "You will find that this approach will help you . . ."

Try this formula to determine whether your writing reflects a "you approach." It's called the Empathy Index.

Count all the second-person references (you, your, yours) and subtract from that number the number of first-person references (I, we, me, mine, etc.). The result is your Empathy Index.

The higher its positive number, the more likely your communication radiates a "you attitude." A negative number signals a need for revision.

■ **Sending the wrong** non-verbal signals. Experts tell us that 65 percent of a message is conveyed non-verbally in face-to-face communication. Yet many people remain unaware of the kinds of non-verbal signals they emit.

To communicate effectively, you've got to send the right kinds of signals and be able to read the signals others are sending to you.

Some suggestions:

- **Become sensitive** to non-verbal messages. Look for such things as body position and movement, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, silence, use of space and time, etc.
- **Avoid sending** mismatched signals. For example, don't peer over your glasses at someone whose confidence you're trying to gain. That signal indicates skepticism or suspiciousness.
- **Watch for** mismatched body language when observing others. *Example:* One person has open arms and leans forward. The other has crossed arms and

leans away. The two may not get together on ideas.

■ **Failing to write** to be understood. Many people write to impress—not to express. They use long, pompous words in the mistaken belief that these words add dignity and strength to their message.

Others obscure their messages because they don't want to take the responsibility for their words or don't want to reveal how little they know.

Good communicators write to be understood. They:

- **Use short** words that communicate clearly and concretely.
- **Present one** idea, at most two ideas, per sentence—and keep their sentences short.
- **Avoid jargon** when writing to laypersons.
- **Use strong** verbs and avoid the passive voice as much as possible.

■ **Lacking knowledge** of audiences. Communicators must relate their messages to the specific characteristics, needs and interests of their audiences. They should know such things as educational levels and occupations; beliefs and attitudes; group loyalties and norms; whether the audience is friendly, hostile or indifferent.

Never send a message unless it's tailored to fit the audience. Ask yourself the following questions before attempting to communicate:

- **How much** does my audience know?
- **What might** people in the audience want to know?
- **What should** they know?
- **How will** they benefit from my message? In other words, what's in it for them?
- **How can** I present my message to them in an interesting way?

■ **Failing to realize** that communication is a two-way process. Many people think that communication is finished when information is imparted. They fail to consider that communication involves getting feedback and evaluating it.

Communicators must go out of their way to seek feedback. *Some suggestions:*

- **Become sensitive** to people. Make it a point to watch for any sign that indicates a change in mood or a lessening of interest.
- **Become an active listener.** Reread and follow the suggestions presented earlier in this report.
- **Ask questions.** And listen carefully to the answers.
- **Consider other feedback devices,** such as surveys and focus panels.

■ **Making obvious** grammar and usage errors. People who appear to have the potential to get ahead sometimes fall short because they failed to learn the rudiments of grammar and usage. Here are four of the most common language errors we've come across:

- **Using a pronoun** that doesn't agree with the word it relates to. *Example:* "Everyone in the room gave *their* opinion." Make it, "his or her opinion."
- **Failing to make** a subject agree with the verb. *Example:* "The repetition of the exercises *help* us gain confidence." Make it, "*helps* us gain confidence."
- **Failing to use** the objective case correctly. *Example:* "between you and *I* . . ." Make it, "between you and *me* . . ."
- **Using redundancies,** such as "revert back" and "drop down." "Revert" and "drop" are sufficient.

Tip: People who struggled to master proper grammar and usage sometimes make mistakes when they get tired. Be especially careful late in the day or when you've had insufficient sleep.

■ **Failing to observe** common courtesies when dealing with people. How others view you has a lot to do with how your messages are received. If you come across as being impersonal or rude, your ability to communicate with people will suffer.

If you're respectful of others and treat them courteously, you'll communicate to them that they're important—and they'll enjoy being in your company and listening to what you have to say.

Try these suggestions:

- **Take a genuine** interest in others and really care about their feelings.
- **Observe the** Golden Rule with everyone—not just those above you in the pecking order.
- **Get in the** habit of using words such as "please" and "thank you."
- **Praise people** when you sincerely believe they deserve it. A short note is often all it takes.

■ **Failing to develop** proper voice quality. Many people never consider how important their voices are when communicating. Voices that are forced or strained—or that are pitched too high or too low—affect how our messages are perceived and received.

Some suggestions to improve voice quality:

- **Learn to breathe** from the diaphragm when speaking. Hold your chest in and allow your mid-section to expand and contract as you breathe in and out.
- **To produce** a natural sound, says Dr. Morton Cooper, a voice-training expert, project your voice through the mask area—the bridge and sides of the nose and around the lips. When you do this correctly, you'll feel a slight tingling and vibration in this area and you'll produce the proper oral-nasal resonance.
- **Avoid raising** your voice to a screech when excited. Remain calm and concentrate on both proper breathing and projecting your voice through the mask area.

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August 1987
Volume 6, Number 10

Harold P. Zelko, Jacksonville, FL

COMMUNICATION

RATE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

One of today's most effective communicators, Lee Iacocca, wrote in his best-selling biography, *Iacocca*, "The most important thing I learned in college was how to communicate." A strong statement, but in today's age of constant interaction with others, how well you communicate may very well be the most important asset in your portfolio for success.

In essence, the way we speak, listen and exchange ideas in the information age is vital. This is true whether making a speech, discussing matters at work, socializing at a cocktail party or talking with members of our family. We spend more time communicating than any other thing we do, except breathing.

The most important ingredient in communicating is realizing everyone is not alike and the other person or group we're communicating with most likely has different interests, backgrounds, beliefs and feelings than we do. The greatest fault, and potential downfall in our communication efforts, is to fail to recognize these differences.

ILLUSTRATION BY CARY WOLZ

All of us tend to be self-centered. We think of *I* and *we* rather than *you* or *them* when we talk or listen to another person or party; we do too much talking to rather than *with* others.

Communication is not simply sending or receiving messages. It is a *two-way* process in which we exchange meaning with others. So we must constantly be aware of how the other perso perceives and interprets what we say.

Try the following test and notice the number of items that show the nee to adapt to others. Be fair in making your ratings: You are probably a better communicator than you think.

For each item, rate yourself on a descending score of 3-2-1 points: three being excellent, two being good and on being fair. After you've completed the exam, you should be able to identify your strengths and weaknesses. Write down your weaknesses and think about them in your day-to-day communication. It'll make your message management more effective.

In speaking:

___My attitude is positive.
___I analyze the situation and listener and adapt to these.
___I plan my purpose related to listener interest and attitude.
___I try to get on common ground.
___My prejudices are submerged.

My message:

___Is organized clearly
___Has a definite and clear purpose
___Adapts opening remarks to listener(s)
___Presents points (not too many) in clear order
___Goes clearly from one point to another (transitions)
___Has sufficient proof and support
___Holds interest and attention
___Uses appropriate language
___Shows clear thinking.

In presenting the message:

___My manner is enthusiastic.
___I look directly at listener(s).
___My posture and gestures are appropriate.
___I project my voice with emphasis and variety.
___I speak clearly and distinctly.
___I adapt to listener reactions.

As a listener:

___I pay full attention to the speaker.
___I look at the speaker.
___I am openminded and empathetic.
___I help establish a pleasant climate.
___I try to understand speaker's purpose.
___I separate facts from opinion.
___I evaluate, not jumping to conclusions.
___I avoid daydreaming.
___I listen fully before trying to talk back or refute the speaker.
___I apply the message to my needs.

___Total score

Evaluating your communication rating:

80-90 — Excellent
70-80 — Good
60-70 — Fair

Harold P. Zelko is a communication and training consultant and author of "Better Seminars and Workshops for Both Sponsor and Participant," PERSONNEL JOURNAL, February 1986.

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1. Briefly state the project:
   - Involve senior citizens living in the school neighborhood in activities at the local school.

2. Purpose(s) of project:
   - To involve these valuable community resources in an active school role to help them share their talents and to also provide services to them.
   - To provide feedback from these community residents about their views of the school program.

3. Procedures:
   - Compile a list of senior citizens living in the immediate school neighborhood (and/or district). This can be done in several ways:
     --Parent/teacher volunteers canvas neighborhood
     --Contact local churches and organized senior citizen groups
     --Check with the central office to see if this group has already been identified and is participating in a "Golden Card Group"--or other district-wide program.
   - Send a letter to senior citizens that you have been able to identify with a survey asking about ways they might participate actively in school:
     --sharing their skills in crafts, photography, woodworking, travel films, music, etc.
     --serving as a volunteer to help students with reading, mathematics, etc.
     --serving as a volunteer in helping get out a newsletter
     --participating in the hot lunch program
     --those "at home" needing special attention (welcome cards and visits from students at the school)
   - Compile information and responses and set up meetings for those willing to work at the school. Invite them to a morning coffee or luncheon, and show them the school: explain the program and activities, and assign a special teacher with whom they will be working. Develop schedules and calendars for activities and see if one of the senior volunteers will take on the assignment of coordinator of senior citizens.

4. Resources:
   - Postage for mailing
   - Funds for breakfast or luncheon meeting
   - Selection of teacher/assignments to work with senior citizens
   - Selection of teacher/parent/volunteers to work with senior citizens at home

5. Timing of project:
   - Project will begin on_____and run for_____weeks.
   - Schedules for senior citizen activities will be developed by_____ and run for_____weeks.

6. Assessment:
   - Each senior citizen will be asked to fill out an anonymous "reaction" form and leave it in the school office at the end of the first month of full activities, and again at the end of the first year of the program.

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A PR COMMUNICATION PROJECT

For: _____
(indicate PUBLIC for which the project is designed)

1. State Project:

2. List purposes of project:

3. List procedures (tasks to be assigned):

4. List resources needed:

5. Develop time-line for project:

6. Develop evaluation/assessment procedure to be used:

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HOW TO CONQUER THE GRAPEVINE

"If you want to get the word out, start a rumor."

That's a cliche, but it's true! The grapevines through which rumors travel are effective vehicles for disseminating information.

There are two basic reasons:

1. Grapevines allow you to reach others face-to-face. A message conveyed through the grapevine has high impact because it is delivered personally.

2. Grapevines automatically take your message to an existing system (network). Everyone is linked to someone else...personally or professionally. Researchers know nine of every ten people who receive a personal message will tell ten others...and one of every ten (the "professional talkers") will tell more than twenty others.

This exercise is designed to help you harness the power of the grapevine. It will help you share positive information about schools (and find out what people think). It requires thirty seconds of your time daily.

STEP ONE

List five people you know who live in the community and have no affiliation with the schools; i.e., they are not related to school employees, they are not school volunteers, they are not members of a parent organization or school booster club, etc. Name only those people you will "bump into" next week.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

STEP TWO

List five people you know who live in the community and are in some way affiliated with the schools Again, name only those people with whom you will have direct contact next week.

	Name	Affiliation
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____

STEP THREE

Now we need some messages to put in the grapevine. They must be short and easy to understand.

List five positive things about your school district:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

STEP FOUR

Some grapevines are "better" than others–they will give your message more credibility and/or more significant distribution. These grapevines often include one or more members of a community's "power structure."

List the three most influential people in your community:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

STEP FIVE

The basic idea is to get your message to key influentials. This assumes you know the people you identified in Step Four and will have direct contact with them next week.

If you don't know and/or won't have direct contact with the key influentials, you can work on reaching them through a "contact" you have.

But nothing is lost if you don't have direct or indirect contact with key influentials. You can place a message in your own grapevine.

Action Steps

1. Are any of the key influentials on the list you developed in Step One? If so, they should be prime targets for your message. Write their names on the GO FORTH AND CONQUER form.

2. Are any of the key influentials on the list you developed in Step Two? If so, write their names on the GO FORTH AND CONQUER form.

3. If you can't reach key influentials directly, can you reach them indirectly (through an affiliation)? Look at the names in Step Two. If you know someone who is affiliated with a key influential, write the name of the person you know on the GO FORTH AND CONQUER form.

4. Use the remaining names in Step One and Step Two to complete your GO FORTH AND CONQUER form.

GO FORTH AND CONQUER

Write the names of five people you know and will have contact with next week. Then select the message (from Step Three) you will personally deliver to each of these people. (You can repeat the same message, but you must reach five different people.)

Do this and you'll reach at least fifty people in five days. (You might want to keep track of how long it takes for your message to come back to you through the grapevine.)

Day	Target	Message
Monday	1. _____	1. _____
Tuesday	2. _____	2. _____
Wednesday	3. _____	3. _____
Thursday	4. _____	4. _____
Friday	5. _____	5. _____

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Who Are Our Publics?

In Our School	In the School System	In the Community
People who are directly associated with our school on a regular basis	People in our school system who would need to be informed and involved with the school	Community members who do not have regular contact

Your Group's TOP Four Priority Publics: (Consensus)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Total Workshop Group's TOP Four Priority Publics:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Involving and Informing Our Publics

Our group's PUBLIC _____

Why do _____ need to be involved with our, system of school-based management?

What do they need to know in order to be most effective in participating?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Communicating Your Action Plan

Goal: _____

Strategy: _____

Tactic: _____

If this part of your action plan is to be successful, which of your publics needs to know about it?	What do they need to know?	Which communication method(s) will be most effective in communi-

Possible Goals For Our School District

Priority Ranking:	List Possible Goals:
_____	1. _____
_____	2. _____
_____	3. _____
_____	4. _____
_____	5. _____
_____	6. _____
_____	7. _____
_____	8. _____
_____	9. _____
_____	10. _____

Possible Goals For Our School

Priority Ranking:	List Possible Goals:
_____	1. _____
_____	2. _____
_____	3. _____
_____	4. _____
_____	5. _____
_____	6. _____
_____	7. _____
_____	8. _____
_____	9. _____
_____	10. _____

Criteria for Publications

The following criteria were established by NSPRA for evaluating publications.

- ☐ Does the design tell the reader at a glance what the publication is about?
- ☐ Does the layout typography make the publication easy to read? Does it have columns, white space, subheads, etc.?
- ☐ Does the publication follow the 30-3-30 principle, offering something to a reader whether he or she is going to spend 30 seconds, 3 minutes, or 30 minutes on it?
- ☐ Do the graphics and art work enhance the printed word (including quality printing, color, or paper stock, ink, etc.)?
- ☐ Are pictures large, clear, well cropped, and show live action? Is there a caption for most pictures?
- ☐ Do you follow these guidelines: If typeset, a serif type is usually recommended and body type should be 9, 10, or 11 pt. Copy lines should be no longer than two alphabets or 52 characters.
- ☐ Do headlines use action words and are they set in caps and lower case? (Sans serif type is most frequently used.)
- ☐ Is the writing style suitable to the audience for which the publication is targeted and is the style maintained through the publication? Would the material pass "Gunning Fox Index" level of grade 9 for general writing?
- ☐ Is there a good lead to capture the reader's attention?
- ☐ Are articles written in inverted pyramid format with key points in the first paragraph, especially in newsletters?
- ☐ Is publication material written for the information needs and interests of the audience for which it is designed?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

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Principals

- ☐ Do you emphasize the PR responsibilities of each staff member in your building?
- ☐ Do you provide an open, two-way leadership style to stimulate healthy communication in your building?
- ☐ Do you involve students, staff, and community in meaningful advisory roles for school programs?
- ☐ Do you publicly praise students and staff for their accomplishments?
- ☐ Do you effectively use your principal's bulletin as a PR vehicle?
- ☐ Do you have a planned, two-way communication program?
- ☐ Do you have an updated, building-level crisis communication plan?
- ☐ Do you run in-service workshops on PR for your staff members?
- ☐ Is your school building considered a "good neighbor" in your community?
- ☐ Do you know your immediate school neighbors on a face-to-face basis?
- ☐ Do you respond promptly to telephone calls from parents and the media?
- ☐ Do you have a news gathering network within your building?
- ☐ Do you know the reporters who cover your school, and have you asked them how you may be more helpful to them and they to you?
- ☐ Have you invited community groups (realtors, senior citizens, rotary, etc.) to your building?
- ☐ Do you have a building newsletter sent to parents and other key external audiences?
- ☐ Do you distribute your student newspaper or yearbook to public places within your community?
- ☐ Do you encourage volunteers to work in your building?
- ☐ Are you visible to staff and students?
- ☐ Are you accessible to staff and students?
- ☐ Do you periodically survey your students, staff, and parents on school-related issues?
- ☐ Do you encourage students and staff to provide opportunities for entertaining and servicing the community?
- ☐ Do you speak to community and service groups at least three times a year?
- ☐ Do you brag with sensible pride about the accomplishments of your staff and students?
- ☐ Do you use your outdoor message board for substantive achievement messages (e.g., 20 students inducted into National Honor Society) instead of "Have a Nice Day!"
- ☐ Are you aware of the various publics in your school's attendance area and which audiences need special attention from your school building?
- ☐ Do you support parent groups and provide assistance in any way you can?
- ☐ Do you encourage your teachers to communicate more effectively with their students' parents? Do you provide the resources and supplies (telephones, good news stationery, etc.) to help them in this area?

- ☐ Do you provide flexible hours for counselors to work and meet with parents?
- ☐ Do you open your building and playing facilities for community groups?
- ☐ Do you orient new staff members and substitute teachers?
- ☐ Do you say or write "thank you" to students, staff, and community residents who make extra efforts?
- ☐ Do you use the four-point communication test when decisions are made:
  - (1) Who needs to know this?
  - (2) What do they need to know?
  - (3) What is the best time and vehicle to communicate this?
  - (4) How will we know the message has been received?
- ☐ Do you attend workshops on PR and take a few staff members with you?
- ☐ Do you encourage staff and students to create special activities that shed a positive light on your school building?
- ☐ Do you hold "family meetings" when all building employees get together—just not the teaching staff?

From: Evaluating Your School PR Investment, National School Public Relations Association, Arlington, Virginia.

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101 WAYS TO GIVE RECOGNITION TO VOLUNTEERS

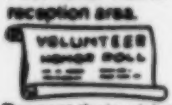
By
Vern Lake
Volunteer Services Consultant, Minnesota Department of Public Welfare

Continuously, but always inconclusively, the subject of recognition is discussed by directors and coordinators of volunteer programs. There is great agreement as to its importance but great diversity in its implementation.

Listed below are 101 possibilities gathered from hither and yon. The duplication of 1 and 101 is for emphasis. The blank at 102 is for the beginning of your own list.

I think it important to remember that recognition is not so much something you do as it is something you are. It is a sensitivity to others as persons, not a strategy for discharging obligations.

1. Smile.
2. Put up a volunteer suggestion box.
3. Treat to a soda.
4. Reimburse assignment-related expenses.
5. Ask for a report.
6. Send a birthday card.
7. Arrange for discounts.
8. Give service stripes.
9. Maintain a coffee bar.
10. Plan annual ceremonial occasions.
11. Invite to staff meeting.
12. Recognize personal needs and problems.
13. Accommodate personal needs and problems.
14. Be pleasant.
15. Use in an emergency situation.
16. Provide a baby sitter.
17. Post Honor Roll in reception area.



18. Respect their wishes.
19. Give informal tess.
20. Keep challenging them.
21. Send a Thanksgiving Day card to the volunteer's family.
22. Provide a nursery.
23. Say "Good Morning."
24. Greet by name.
25. Provide good pre-service training
26. Help develop self-confidence.

27. Award plaques to sponsoring group.
28. Take time to explain fully.
29. Be verbal.
30. Motivate agency VIP's to converse with them.
31. Hold rap sessions.
32. Give additional responsibility.
33. Afford participation in team planning.
34. Respect sensitivities.
35. Enable to grow on the job.
36. Enable to grow out of the job.
37. Send newsworthy information to the media.
38. Have wine and cheese tasting parties.

39. Ask client-patient to evaluate their work-service.
40. Say "Good Afternoon."
41. Honor their preferences.
42. Create pleasant surroundings.
43. Welcome to staff coffee breaks.
44. Enlist to train other volunteers.
45. Have a public reception.
46. Take time to talk.
47. Defend against hostile or negative staff.
48. Make good plans
49. Commend to supervisory staff.
50. Send a valentine.
51. Make thorough pre-arrangements.
52. Persuade "personnel" to equate volunteer experience with work experience.
53. Admit to partnership with paid staff.

54. Recommend to prospective employer.
55. Provide scholarships to volunteer conferences or workshops.
56. Offer advocacy roles.
57. Utilize as consultants.
58. Write them thank you notes.
59. Invite participation in policy formulation.
60. Surprise with coffee and cake.
61. Celebrate outstanding projects and achievements.
62. Nominate for volunteer awards.
63. Have a "Presidents Day" for new presidents of sponsoring groups.

THANKS

64. Carefully match volunteer with job.
65. Praise them to their friends.
66. Provide substantive in-service training.
67. Provide useful tools in good working condition.
68. Say "Good Night."
69. Plan staff and volunteer social events.
70. Be a *real* person.
71. Rent billboard space for public laudation.
72. Accept their individuality.
73. Provide opportunities for conferences and evaluation.
74. Identify age groups.
75. Maintain meaningful file.
76. Send impromptu fun cards.

77. Plan occasional extravaganzas.
78. Instigate client planned surprises.
79. Utilize purchased newspaper space.
80. Promote a "Volunteer-of-the-Month" program.
81. Send letter of appreciation to employer.
82. Plan a "Recognition Edition" of the agency newsletter.
83. Color code name tags to indicate particular achievements (hours, years, unit, etc.).
84. Send commendatory letters to prominent public figures.
85. Say "we missed you."
86. Praise the sponsoring group or club.
87. Promote staff smiles.
88. Facilitate personal maturation.
89. Distinguish between groups and individuals in the group.
90. Maintain safe working conditions.
91. Adequately orientate.
92. Award special citations for extraordinary achievements.
93. Fully indoctrinate regarding the agency.
94. Send Christmas cards.
95. Be familiar with the details of assignments.
96. Conduct community-wide, cooperative, inter-agency recognition events.
97. Plan a theater party.
98. Attend a sports event.
99. Have a picnic.
100. Say "Thank You."
101. Smile

102.

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6. POSTERS, WALLCHARTS AND BANNERS

When designing items that will be viewed from a variety of distances, one of the most basic problems is how to ensure that the scale of lettering is correct.

The words you are reading on this page are about 50 cm (20 inches) away from your eyes. The x height of the letters is about 0.3 cm (⅛ inch).

If you increase the distance from which you are reading from 50 cm (20 inches) to 50 metres (164 feet), then you would have to increase the size of the x height of the lettering from 0.3 cm (⅛ inch) to about 12.5 cm (5 inches) to get the same ease of reading.

It is always best to do a test on any lettering you are going to use. Decide on a 'typical' distance from which it will be read and then try some different sizes to see which is the most suitable. If in any doubt, go for the larger size.

In addition, the letters not only need to be larger but they must be further apart from each other. Err on the generous side: more space, not less, between letters.

DISTANCE CHART

Distance of viewer from letters (metres)	(feet)	Sensible minimum size of 'x' height (cm)	(inches)
10	33	2.5	1
20	66	5	2
30	98	7.5	3
40	131	10	4
60	197	15	6
80	262	20	8

The figures in the table are only approximations. They will change according to the particular kind of letterform and typeface you are using. This table refers to Helvetica, which is a particularly clean and clear typeface developed specifically for easy legibility.

If you are using fine delicate lettering or a highly decorated typeface, then the sizes will have to be increased.

If the sign is either in a high or low position, the letters will be distorted for the viewer. This must be compensated for.

A banner is one of the most effective ways to make a statement. Because the message appears simultaneously with the message, onlookers are forced to take note and challenged to react.

Copyfitting

To find out how many pages of copy to assign for a one-page article in your paper, look up the paper's style type in the left-hand column and the page size and page guideline (p. 48) across the top of the chart. Where those two columns meet in the middle, you'll see how many pages of typed, double-spaced copy you need (typed on an elite typewriter).

Style Type for Finished Paper:	5-1/2" x 7" page, half full of article type	5-1/2" x 7" page, 2/3 full of article type	8-1/2" x 11" page, half full of article type	8-1/2" x 11" page, 2/3 full article type	8-1/2" x 14" page, half full of article type	8-1/2" x 14" page 2/3 full of article type	11" x 17" page, half full of article type	11" x 17" page, 2/3 full of article type
	How many pages of typed, double-spaced copy you need for one-page article:							
Typed into Columns with Elite Typewriter	just over 1/3 page typed copy	1/2 page typed copy	1 page typed copy	1-1/3 pages typed copy	1-1/3 pages typed copy	1-3/4 pages typed copy	a little over 2 pages typed copy	almost 3 pages typed copy
Typed into Columns with Pica Typewriter	1/3 page typed copy	just under 1/2 page typed copy	just under 1 page typed copy	just over 1 page typed copy	just over 1 page typed copy	1-1/2 pages typed copy	just over 1-3/4 pages typed copy	2-1/3 pages typed copy
Typeset in 9 point Times Roman	2/3 page typed copy	1 page typed copy	2 pages typed copy	2-1/2 pages typed copy	2-1/2 pages typed copy	3-1/4 pages typed copy	4 pages typed copy	5 pages typed copy
Typeset in 10 point Times Roman	1/2 page typed copy	2/3 page typed copy	1-1/2 pages typed copy	2 pages typed copy	just under 2 pages typed copy	2-1/2 pages typed copy	3 pages typed copy	4 pages typed copy
Typeset in 11 point Times Roman	just under 1/2 page typed copy	just over 1/2 page typed copy	just over 1 page typed copy	1-1/2 pages typed copy	1-1/2 pages typed copy	2 pages typed copy	2-1/2 pages typed copy	3-1/4 pages typed copy

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BACK PORCH NEWS

Suggested PR Planning Calendar

July

* Plan public relations/community relations program for the coming school year.
* Prepare back to school information.
* Update local media list so you always know who to contact. Send that contact person directory, student handbook, school brochure.

August

* Make a contact with PTA president/publicity chairperson to coordinate activities for the year.
* Prepare first issue of daily announcement sheet for teachers/staff for their first day at school. Include bio on new staff members.

September

* Sponsor a welcome activity for new staff members (a "New Years" party).
* Establish a task force to begin preparations for American Education Week celebration in your building.
* Get ready to support the United Way campaign.
* Survey staff members to find potential talent/contacts/interests. Judy has a sample.
* Prepare a parent/community newsletter.

October

* Finalize plans for American Education Week.
* Provide Halloween safety information.
* Parent/community newsletter.

November

* Observe American Education Week.
* Sponsor an activity to honor classified personnel.
* Parent/community newsletter.

December

* Send out Christmas cards to news media, legislators, board members and others who have assisted you and/or your program.
* Organize a service project with staff/students, etc. or lend your support to another group in your building that is working on such a project.
* Make gift suggestions to parents (books, educational toys, etc.)
* Prepare parent newsletter.

January

* Make a list of community leaders in your service area. Add them to your school newsletter mailing list.
* Sponsor a project on bus safety/courtesy.
* Parent newsletter.

February

* Help lobby for educational causes.
* Send valentines...to students, teachers, classified staff, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians.
* Parent newsletter.

March

* Begin planning for end of the year programs. Publicize the dates.
* Sponsor an image-building campaign for students and staff.
* Parent newsletter.

April

* Send thank you notes to legislators who supported education bills.
* Write a letter to the editor praising parent volunteers in your school.
* Evaluate your pr program for the year.
* Parent newsletter.

May

* Select a committee/task force to plan next year's pr campaign.
* What is your staff doing during the summer? Tip the newspaper on unusual or outstanding programs/ideas.
* Celebrate teacher appreciation day.
* Parent newsletter.

June

* Give parents tips on helping students learn during the summer months as well as travel trips for educational value.

"GOIN' OUT IN STYLE"

- With the announcement of the decision to close a school the school administrative staff should make an immediate resolve to accept the decision gracefully and to accent the positive.

- Send students out in June to their new schools with confidence in themselves and their ability to succeed in the new schools, and with a positive orientation toward these schools.

- An all-school and all-community campaign was launched with the theme "Goin' Out in Style":

  --Ordered buttons for all students, staff and interested parents with the theme "Goin' Out in Style."
  --Staff wore buttons for a two-week period to build up interest in the idea--students given buttons at Kick-Off Assembly Campaign.

- Planned campaign to emphasize three elements:

  --Aimed to do the unexpected--for example, at the traditional Christmas music assembly, three Santas (the principal, assistant principal and counselor) suddenly appeared and gave candy canes to every student.
  --Celebrated each "last" event--the last home basketball game--not in mourning, but as a tribute to the school and in memory of more than 10,000 students who had graduated from the school.
  --Sought continuous and widespread involvement of students, staff and parents in planning the calendar of events.

- The planning committee included teachers, students and parents who planned special events extending over the second semester of the school year. Events planned:

  --International night festival
  --Inter-school visits for students to visit their new schools
  --Special historical issues of the student newspaper
  --Special class trips
  --Alumni night
  --Special graduation exercises

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local building staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local building staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Morale and attitude among staff, students and parents as school is closed.

YOUR BUILDING NEWSLETTER

- Format--keep the newsletter short and simple. An 8½" x 11" sheet printed on one or two sides is sufficient for a principal's newsletter to parents. Make it attractive, neat, well-organized, accurate and publish regularly, not whenever "there's enough news to print."

- Writing--KISS is the word to remember--Keep It Simple, Stupid! Use simple words, short sentences, short paragraphs and action verbs. Avoid like the plague all educational gobbledygook. Who really understands "cognitive and affective domains?" Include in the lead--who, what, when, where, why and how so the reader learns the gist of the story even if he/she reads only the lead. Standardize your style.

- Art--If you use photographs or clip art (drawings clipped out of a "clip book") for sale from such companies as Educational Communication Center (Box 657, Camp Hill, Pa. 17011), use good ones, both technically and ones that say something. Have actions in photos.

- Special tips for typewritten newsletters--Use generous margins, up to about 7/8 of an inch. Single space the story itself and double space between paragraphs. No paragraphs longer than eight lines. Double space between a headline and the story. Triple space between the end of one story and the headline of the next story. Don't handletter headlines; use art transfer type available at a good art supply store. Don't use italics (except possibly for short captions), or script type, and use a pica typewriter, preferably with serif type.

- Content--Parents want to know: How their child is doing, what's taught and how, special services, policies (particularly as they pertain to their child), how the money is spent.

- Distribution--Publications sent home with students above the fifth grade probably won't get there. Mail it. Consider a bulk mailing permit. Ask the PTA or a parent group to defray mailing costs. Maintain an up-to-date mailing list--include your KEY COMMUNICATORS, and the community power structure. Consider distribution to places of business around the school neighborhood, and to all churches or synagogues.

TIMING OF PROJECT: (A schedule to be developed by local building staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local building staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Conduct an informal, face-to-face survey. Send out a simple questionnaire. Make random phone calls. Set up a cross-section advisory committee.

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SET UP A KEY COMMUNICATORS NETWORK

- With the help of the total school staff and members of the parent group, identify those people in the school area who <u>regularly talk to large numbers of people</u>:

  --barbers
  --beauticians
  --clergy
  --realtors
  --merchants
  --gas station operators
  --school crossing guards
  --postmaster/and or mailcarriers
  --key students
  --key staff members

- After the list has been made the principal should send a letter to those identified advising them that they have been selected to serve as KEY COMMUNICATORS and explaining the nature of the organization.
- Those invitees that accept are asked to attend a small group meeting of about seven of the KEY COMMUNICATORS.
- The small group meetings are informal and designed to build confidence between KEY COMMUNICATORS and the school principal--to see him/her as a person who cares about kids, understands that problems exist, and wants to find ways to improve the school program.
- Ask KEY COMMUNICATORS to call the school principal when <u>they hear a rumor</u> and tell them they will be immediately apprised of information about the schools when a problem, challenge or need exists.
- Help KEY COMMUNICATORS develop solid rapport with the school staff so they in turn can help the community gain confidence in "their" school.
- Send a steady flow of information to KEY COMMUNICATORS. The principal should call them periodically to ask what they are hearing and any suggestions they may have.

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)

ASSESSMENT: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)

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INTERNAL PR

- People Things To Do:
  - If you have a district communication specialist, make sure he/she is a part of the superintendent's cabinet. Your specialist will be totally informed and aware of the "why" behind decisions.
  - Establish advisory committees:
    —cabinet
    —staff (support and professional)
    —task oriented
  - Breakfast or luncheon with the superintendent and/or principal.
  - In-building visits by principals/central office personnel.
  - Fair and open decision-making process--make certain that the total staff is aware of the process and has opportunities for input.

- Publication/Paper Things To Do:
  - Internal Newsletter--once a week or once every two weeks with information for, about and by the total staff.
  - School Board Wrap-Up--a morning-after board meeting report.
  - Summary Board Agenda--for employee bulletin board prior to every meeting.
  - Mini-Minutes of staff meetings.
  - Policy manuals.
  - Special publications for special purposes--rules and regulations, district calendars, handbooks for parents, etc.
  - Employee handbooks.
  - Organizational charts.
  - Suggestion boxes.
  - Certificates of recognition.

- Upward Communication:
  - Communication is a two-way street, and central office administrators need to learn to listen and make use of employee feedback.
  - Employees need to make certain they provide continuing input into the two-way communication flow.

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be determined by local district staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be determined by local district staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Conduct an annual survey of the staff to determine attitudes. Have a staff committee work with administrators in development, tabulation and compilation of the survey. Publish results.

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PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

- Help teachers plan for conference.
- Help parent(s) prepare for conference.
- Help student(s) understand that teachers and parents are working as a team to improve his/her educational program.

PROCEDURES:

- Develop a conference schedule that provides opportunities for career parents to attend early morning, evening or weekend conferences.
- Suggest that parents prepare a list of things that will help the teacher understand their child better—special health needs or problems, outside interests, hobbies, feelings about school, relationship with brothers and sisters.
- Suggest that parents make a list of things they want to find out from the teacher. For example: services and programs the school offers, discipline policy, grading policy, extracurricular activities, daily schedule, homework policy, health and safety program.
- Discuss the child's school progress—ability to do school work, current level in reading and math including samples of work he/she has done, special interests and abilities, books and materials the child is using, how he/she gets along with others, how he/she feels about self and behavior in and out of class.
- Suggest that parents talk over the conference beforehand with their child to get ideas about what should be covered and to help relieve anxiety about the conference. After the conference suggest that parents tell the child what was discussed (omitting any information he/she may not be mature enough to understand), and be certain to talk about any changes or new plans. Be positive.
- Begin conference on a positive note and listen carefully and sympathetically.
- Get away from your desk and sit at a small conference table or student desk so there is no barrier between you and the parents.

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local school building staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local school building staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Each parent is given a three-question survey form: Did this conference accomplish what you wanted it to? What was the most effective part of the conference? What should we do differently next time? The questionnaires are deposited in a box at the school entrance or on the principal's desk.

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MEDIA TIP SHEET

- To keep the various news media supplied with a good selection of school news possibilities for use as they choose.
- To improve coverage of "good news" about the school.
- To keep the fact that the school exists before news reporters every week.
- To help make the reporter's job easier and thus improve rapport between school and the press.

PROCEDURES:

- Keep an eye out for and a file of interesting upcoming activities for the "Tip Sheet."
- Talk with teachers to see what's going on and figure out ways to make activities fit news requirements—i.e., picture possibilities, time activity can be scheduled, availability of someone to tell the story.
- Keep the write-up of each item short—include day, date, time, address, short descriptive sentences centering around news peg. Don't tell whole "gory" story. The media will (and prefer to) develop it in their own way.

TIMING OF PROJECT:

- Send weekly; mailing next week's tips toward the end of each week to allow time for scheduling by media.

RESOURCES:

- A little staff time—two hours per week will do.
- A duplicating machine.
- A little postage.

ASSESSMENT: Count number of stories used. Questionnaire filled out by media reporters.

PR PLAN FOR THE BASIC SKILLS

- Help parents and other key publics understand the school's commitment to provide the best possible education in the basics.
- Involve parents and other selected publics in the curriculum planning process.
- Help parents and other publics understand how students are performing in the basic skills.
- Give parents and other publics insight into programs being offered.
- Gain information from parents and others about how the programs are working.
- Gain support for the programs which are developed.

PROCEDURE:

- Identify publics who need to know about basic programs and results.
- Adopt a curriculum planning process involving parents, students and other appropriate publics.
- Meet with the school system cabinet, school principals and curriculum developers to determine what is basic, to gain information and to test communication ideas--seek input.
- Hold inservice sessions for principals and staff members to assure that all understand basics programs and how they should work.
- Present the curriculum proposal to the board of education for study and adoption.
- Prepare a slide presentation or videotape production on each program, to be shown to students, parents, the community at large, on television, etc. Couple the presentation with an explanatory brochure.
- Hold "family meetings" in each school to explain program to total staff (professional and support staff).
- Hold roundtable discussions at PTA and other parent group meetings. Display materials and discuss programs with parents at Open House events.
- Ask each teacher and building administrator to make "one phone call a week" to a parent to ask how things are going. Comments will be recorded on feedback sheets and kept on file by the principal.
- The schools will feed back progress reports to the board, community and other publics through newsletters, the news media and other channels.
- Encourage staff members to share interesting stories about programs for building newsletters or distribution to the news media.

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Comments received by principals from a "phone call a week." Possible pre-and post-surveys to determine understanding and feelings. Level of involvement and support. Accomplishments of communication projects.

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CALL WITH A GOOD MESSAGE

- Pledge a total staff commitment to call one or more parents each week with "good news" about his/her child...to compliment and to express friendly interest.
- Make every effort to gain the cooperation of the teacher's association, building principals and others who might be making calls.
- Prepare guidelines including the cooperative objectives established by school district administration and teachers.
- Provide a proper facility. If a teacher must stand up at the secretary's desk or ask the principal to leave his/her office in order to use the telephone, it will be difficult for the program to succeed.
- Provide a reporting system. Maintain a log in the principal's office, or have a teacher, volunteer or school secretary log the total calls made each week, month, etc.

RESOURCES:

- Time must be provided for teachers to make the calls.
- Additional telephone lines may be needed to handle increased loads and at the same time make lines available for regular school business.

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local school building or district staff.)

ASSESSMENT: Tabulation of the calls made with a reaction sheet for teacher and/or principal to report their evaluation of each individual call. Compilation of this information will provide helpful input on attitudes of those called as well as their reaction to the call.

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TAKE A STUDENT ATTITUDE SURVEY

- Discover what students really think about their school experience.
- Locate problems, interests and needs of students as individuals.
- Help teachers approach students as individuals and help them with their problems.
- Help students deal with their feelings.

PROCEDURES:

- Confidentiality must be maintained in evaluating the form. Students generally will answer in terms of what they really feel only if they are sure their answers will be kept confidential.
- Stress that no one but the teacher will read the answers.
- Provide copies of the Survey Form to all teachers who plan to administer it to their students.

Dallas Pupil Survey Form

1. What is now giving you the greatest satisfaction?
2. What do you like most about school?
3. What do you like least about school?
4. What is your greatest problem at the present time?
5. What are you most afraid of?

HERE IS YOUR CHANCE TO SAY EXACTLY WHAT YOU THINK. You may write anything you like, but it must be just what you think.

6. Today I feel_____
7. When I have to read I_____
8. I get angry when_____
9. To be grown up_____
10. My idea of a good time is_____
11. I can't understand why_____
12. School is_____

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local school building staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local school building staff.)

ASSESSMENT: (To be developed by local school building staff.)

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STUDENT DISCIPLINE—THE PRINCIPAL'S RESPONSIBILITY

The major expressed concern of parents and patrons of public high schools is student discipline. Determining exactly what is meant by "Student Discipline" is a very difficult task as its definition varies from person to person. Most parents and patrons agree, however, that the principal is the person who is responsible for establishing a school climate that enhances the learning and teaching environment. In establishing a good school climate the principal must be able to communicate effectively with students, parents, community members and the total school staff.

These practices listed below are helpful in efforts to establish a positive school climate for teaching and learning:

- Good News - Happy Calls—The Good News Gram is a positive individual note to a parent about his/her child. The Happy Call is the same but is a telephone call rather than a note.
- Student Supreme Court—Students who are judged to be guilty of some infraction by an administrator and who feel they are unjustly accused have the right to appeal this decision to the Student Supreme Court. This court is composed of the student council representatives from that student's grade level. The student who feels that he has been unjustly accused meets with the council members and the principal, as well as the administrator or teacher who alleges the student has broken some rule or regulation. If the council members decide the student is innocent, there is no disciplinary action taken against him. If found guilty, he receives the punishment that was given to him initially from the administrator from whom he was seeking appeal. If the Student Supreme Court indicates guilty and recommends leniency, their wishes are taken into consideration.
- Academic Letter—Senior students who maintain a 3.5 grade point ratio are given an academic letter at an Awards Night program that is held just for them and their parents. The only requirement for this award is the GPR.
- Principal Listens: Once each semester the principal meets with the entire teaching staff during their free period. This provides opportunity to hear from the teachers. The same process of the Principal Listens is held during lunch once each nine weeks for students who wish to come.
- Evening Detention—The purpose of the Evening Detention Program is to provide administrators with an alternative for suspendable offenses other than having the student miss instructional time. This alternative could be used prior to the in-school suspension or a regular out-of-school suspension. The program meets on Thursday evenings from 5:00 to 8:00 with transportation the sole responsibility of the student. Students are assigned for no more than three hours and not less than one and one-half hours, and must report with sufficient assigned work from classroom teachers to fully occupy their assigned time. The professional who runs the Evening Detention Program is paid $10 per hour and is responsible for communication back to the administrator from whom the evening detention assignment was made. If it is determined that the student needs remedial help, materials such as outlined in the in-school suspension program are used.

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MONTHLY TELEPHONE SURVEY

- Call 50 parents each month selected at random from parents lists requesting their answers to no more than five key questions:

  --SAMPLE: Are you receiving the school newsletter?
  What suggestions do you have for ways we could improve it?
  Do you like the present grading system?
  Are you receiving enough information about school plans?
  Would you like to have evening conference hours?

- Enlist the help of five volunteers to make 10 phone calls each month--either from their homes or from school phones.

- Prepare a script with the questions asking the callers to identify themselves, saying that they are calling for the school and asking the person called to take a few minutes to answer five questions.

- Develop a sheet on which the callers can write their answers or provide a check-off list for them: "Yes, No, Comments..."

- Involve the total staff in determining questions to be asked each month, and solicit suggestions from parents as well.

- Provide a feedback system on the surveys. Report that you are going to ask the questions and then report the answers. You will find that this builds interest in the program.

- Provide answers to concerns of those called. Have the volunteer callers take down any questions or concerns and call back with the information requested. If the answer will take additional time, call immediately to report that you are collecting the information needed and will call as soon as you have it.

TIMING OF PROJECT: (To be developed by local building staff.)

RESOURCES: (To be developed by local building staff.)

ASSESSMENT: (To be determined by local building staff.)

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PR Mini Tip

Building-Level
School Communication
Workshop Kit

INVOLVING NON-PARENTS IN THE SCHOOLS

As the population ages and school enrollments shrink, educators no longer have a choice about including non-parents in the school communication network. Non-parents are making more and more of the financial decisions affecting schools. The Columbus (Ohio) Public Schools involved 50,000 non-parents in a program to COME AND SEE FOR YOURSELF. Here are 25 of their ideas:

1. Set a goal of one non-parent visitor per pupil with incentives for pupils. Have visitors sign a guest book.
2. Make a mailing list of non-parents living near your school. Have students write personal invitations and enclose a self-portrait so the visitor will recognize them.
3. Send "pickeners" out to shopping centers with signs urging people to "See For Yourself," or place "See For Yourself" posters in neighborhood store fronts, other public buildings and meeting places.
4. Place a classified ad in the neighborhood paper with a "See For Yourself" invitation.
5. Send "See For Yourself" invitations to area churches to put in their weekly bulletins.
6. Get area merchants to provide "See For Yourself" coupons which can be exchanged for "freebies."
7. Start a challenge chain—challenge a well-known Columbusite to come to school, then ask that person to challenge another to "See For Yourself."
8. Compose a school song. Serenade the non-parents in your neighborhood, with an invitation to "See For Yourself."
9. Watch the birth announcements in the newspaper for addresses in your neighborhood. Send congratulatory notes along with an invitation to visit school.
10. As a class project, have students write personal invitations to a non-parent neighbor.
11. Contact employers in the vicinity of your school. Ask them to release employees for a school visit.
12. Contact real estate offices in your area and invite them to hold their next staff meeting at your school.
13. Contact business and civic organizations and suggest they tour your school in lieu of one of their monthly meetings.
14. Invite Senior Citizens to:
    • Attend a school event • Show their travel slides to a class • Volunteer in the library • Read to children • Eat lunch at school
15. Offer discounts or free admission to school events to Golden Buckeye Card Holders.
16. Invite Seniors to play in the school band or orchestra.
17. Hold a 1930s or '40s dance and invite non-parents.
18. Plan a staff meeting around some "How To" speaker—preparing tax returns, estate planning, family budgeting, etc.,—and invite non-parents to attend.
19. Have a "Family Day" when all the members of your school staff invite their families to visit school.
20. Contact alumni and invite them to return. Try to arrange to have some retired teachers to greet them.
21. Honor a "good citizen of the week" with an invitation to lunch or a special program.
22. Invite local craftsmen to demonstrate their crafts throughout the year. Then have students display what they learned and invite the craftsmen back.
23. Invite a disc jockey to visit the school—perhaps even do a remote broadcast.
24. If you have an empty classroom, offer it to a public health agency.
25. Use non-parents as judges for student contests.

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BUILD PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AT THE LOCAL SCHOOL

The question is not whether to build public confidence in public education in the United States of America as the nation, and its public schools, step cautiously, perhaps tentatively, through the fiscal and political uncertainties of the 1980s. THE QUESTION, rather, IS HOW?

...Public confidence cannot be bought. It cannot be bartered. It can't be begged or borrowed or achieved through sleight of hand. It must be earned through actions and a great deal of planned, systematic, communication effort, involving the entire school district family--PROFESSIONAL AND SUPPORT STAFF MEMBERS ALIKE.

1. There must be COMMITMENT on the part of the school board and superintendent. And, perhaps most important--and often overlooked--there must be commitment on the part of the people out there: teachers, aides, bus drivers, principals, librarians, secretaries, custodians--those people who deal person-to-person with the public every day.

2. The commitment must be absolute, complete, total. It must run deep. It must pervade the very fabric of the school district. It must encompass all means of communication from the superintendent's address to the Rotary to chatter by employees at bridge clubs and poker tables and swimming pools and barrooms.

BUILD YOUR OWN CONFIDENCE CAMPAIGN:

- Public confidence begins at home. The solution is better interpersonal communication and increased internal communication efforts.
- Determine your public's confidence level. You need to know what your various publics in the community think about the schools, what they would like to know about them, where they are presently getting their information about schools and what they would like their schools to be like in the future.
- Reach out to your community. You must have a structured plan for encouraging valid two-way communication, for generating feedback from a reliable, objective network of community representatives day after day, month after month, year after year.
- Tell your own POSITIVE story using every communication tool known--both mass communication and interpersonal communication techniques.
- Build confidence with the media. Develop an ongoing campaign with the media to provide them with information about the positive things happening in your schools, as well as the facts.
- Start your confidence campaign at the local building. Any confidence campaign must include a total effort on the part of staffs of each local school.

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COMMUNICATIONS TIPS

May/June, 1984

WSSDA COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE

Washington State School Directors' Association

WHAT ADMINISTRATORS CAN DO TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY RELATIONS

- Organize a speaker's bureau composed of staff and board members to speak to PTAs and community groups.
- Ask business and industry representatives to exhibit their materials and products and discuss their activities with students.
- Install a hotline or rumor control telephone to answer questions from callers to check on possible trouble areas.
- Hold briefing sessions once or twice a year with bartenders and beauticians.
- Invite representative groups or parents to have an early morning breakfast at a local school once a week. Solicit their concerns, problems of their children and what suggestions they have to improve conditions.
- Hold brief seminars every six months with realtors and real estate salespersons. Give them printed materials to distribute to new residents.
- Form student advisory committees to study problems and make recommendations.
- Publish a fact book containing administrators' and teachers' addresses, policies, locations of schools and other information of value to parents.
- Publish similar booklets for teachers and students.
- Conduct human relations seminars for staff and students.
- Study the management styles of administrators. Counsel those who seem to possess "anti-humanistic" attitudes of relating to people.
- Provide news releases to newspapers, radio and television stations and community leaders.
- Send thank-you-grams to staff and students who go above and beyond the call of duty.
- Publish a staff newsletter weekly.
- Sit and eat with students in the cafeteria.
- Conduct surveys of citizens to learn of their thoughts about schools.
- Invite citizens into schools to observe programs.
- Prepare weekly (even brief daily) reports for local radio and television stations.
- Conduct public tours of buildings on a periodic basis.
- Send birthday and other appropriate cards to members of the staff.
- Set up a bulletin board in each school and post laudatory materials (letters for jobs well done, newspaper stories, notices) on it.
- Teach for at least one class period each week.
- Meet with each staff member at least once a year.
- Make a slide show about a new program and make it available to community groups.
- Conduct seminars on public relations for top administrators and teachers.

(OVER)

- Place suggestion boxes in all schools and central office.
- Invite citizens and students to participate in teacher in-service training programs.
- Encourage community and student participation in curriculum planning.
- Send a one-page superintendent's newsletter to all employees each week.
- Recognize staff and student achievements at board and staff meetings.
- Sponsor a toastmaster's club locally and encourage administrators and teachers to join to improve speaking skills.
- Publish guidelines on how to avoid jargon in writing.
- Conduct neighborhood seminars on problems of local interest.
- Be accessible specified times to staff, students and parents to discuss problems, gripes or suggestions.

COMMUNICATIONS TIPS

WSSDA COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE

Washington State School Directors' Association

August, 1984

TOPIC: WRITING

FROM: Jim Magmer, journalism instructor, Portland Community College, Portland, Oregon

These elements of style found in all good news writing will make your releases, newsletters, even your memos, more readable and effective:

1. Generally, use short sentences. Average length for best readability, according to Dr. Rudolph Flesh, is 19 words.

2. Use short paragraphs, three to four typewritten lines, double spaced.

3. Use words of ordinary conversation. Avoid dictionary words, jargon or business, trade, education, etc.

4. Use people words, names, nouns that connote people like house, office, store, school.

5. Check each pronoun. Is the story improved by substituting the noun for which the pronoun stands?

6. Favor strong active verbs, especially in your lead. Check to see if each passive verb can be replaced with an active verb.

7. Use adjectives sparingly.

8. Use direct and indirect quotations.

9. Be sure each quote is attributed to a reliable source.

10. Avoid editorializing--stick to your facts.

11. Be sure facts substantiate each point made in your lead.

12. Time, day, date, place are given in that order.

13. Identify each person in your story so that there is no mistake about who the person is. Use first name, middle initial, last name, age, address, title or occupation.

14. Generally use the word said for attribution. Overuse of synonyms calls attention to the attribution and distracts the reader.

15. Organizations, on first reference, full name. Letters on second.

16. People, full name on first reference; second, last name only for both men and women. First names may be used in feature stories on second reference.

MINI-WORKSHOP

San Antonio, Texas

July 14, 1987

TOPIC: IMPROVING STAFF MORALE THROUGH INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS
PRESENTED BY: Ruth Lester, Communications Director
Shaker Heights City School District
Shaker Heights, OH 44120

The internal audience is teachers, central administration, secretaries, aids, custodians, maintenance personnel, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, nurses, librarians, volunteers

Reasons for Communicating with your Employees Before Anyone Else

- Good public relations begins at home. Your employees deserve to know what's happening in your schools before the public finds out. Whether the news is good or bad, they deserve to hear it first. If they know what's happening, they can be terrific advocates for your schools. If they find out through second-hand information, they are very likely to be resentful and convey their resentment to the public. None can be more detrimental to the schools than an uninformed employee.

- If your employees are kept abreast of changes in your school district, and they know you are making a special effort to keep them informed, they are likely to be very supportive of the changes. They may also provide constructive ideas because they feel as though they belong and are a part of the system.

- Staff morale will be improved. People work better when they feel they're "part of the system." Studies show that employees need to feel they are "in on things."

- It is very important for information to flow in both directions. Staff morale will not be improved if communication is only given and never asked for.

Components of an Internal PR Program

- Personal Contact
  - Visit schools
  - Teach a class
  - Superintendent's Professional Advisory Committee
  - Open door policy
  - Student Advisory Committee
  - Superintendent's Special Meetings
- Publications
  - Staff Newsletter
  - Superintendent's Update
  - Elementary staff memos
  - Board Talk
  - Community Newsletter
  - Employee manuals
  - Calendar
  - Special purpose publications
  - Meeting minutes
- Recognition
  - School Board
  - Letters

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WALLINGFORD SWARTHMORE

SCHOOL DISTRICT

200 SOUTH PROVIDENCE ROAD, WALLINGFORD, PENNSYLVANIA 19086

SKILL SHEET

The Jewel in the Crown: Marketing through Participation

Presenter: James F. Proud, member of district's Board of School Directors
chairperson of Board's Community Relations Committee

Rationale
- The best way to let people know you have a good product is to let them sample it.
- The best way to win support for local schools from non-parents (who make up the majority of the community's taxpayers) is to provide services for them, as well as for school-age children.

History
- For many years, our district has sponsored a Community Aquatics Program which makes the high school pool available to residents.
- Facilities are also provided to a community-based group that offers an evening adult education program.
- A Gold Card Club offers free admission to school events for senior citizens. Members may also lunch in the cafeteria of any district school. Each month they receive a packet of district publications and the menu for the coming month.
- In 1983, our Board Community Relations Committee recommended opening classes to district residents as soon as the consolidation of the district's two high schools into one new high school was complete. This program, begun in 1984-85, has become "the jewel in the crown" of our community service efforts.

Implementation

DO	DON'T
. consult in advance with your high school faculty	. initiate program without knowledge and support of faculty to be involved
. have a coordinator to work with high school administrators in identifying courses	. include courses where low enrollment is specifically required by teacher or the nature of the course
. provide registration procedures and course descriptions in mailings to all district households	. plan registration procedures without consultation with and cooperation of school administrators
. supplement mailing with broad media coverage	. allow adults to "audit" courses
. require adults to attend regularly and meet all course requirements	. allow adults into advanced courses without assurance that they have requisite background and/or skills
. arrange for adult student/teacher interviews and where necessary require competency examination prior to registration	. enroll too many adult students in any one class
. make high school students aware of the program - perhaps, interviews in school newspaper	. enroll adult students in class taught by teacher who is negative about the program
. invite adult students to lunch in cafeteria with "classmates"	

Finally, EVALUATE, EVALUATE, EVALUATE!

For further information:
Community Relations Office,
(215) 566-9002

Cheap Frills: Inexpensive Ways to Dress Up Your PR Program

Lois Lange, ASPR
Communications Specialist
Walled Lake Schools
695 N. Pontiac Trail
Walled Lake, MI 48088
313-624-4801

Good school public relations programs use the RACE formula - Research, Analysis, Communication, Evaluation. Too often, however, the "communication" portion is limited by funds available.

Your school district does a good job and you want to make sure your whole community knows it. Here are some low cost activities to stretch your PR dollar - and your PR program's effectiveness.

Create your own special event

Hold a "school pride week." Ask your mayor and school board to issue special proclamations. Take samples of your students' schoolwork downtown or into the mall. Display them proudly in store windows and be sure to identify each display with the names of the school district, school, teacher and student. Ask business persons with letterboards to display a special "school pride" message during your special week. Provide placemats to local restaurants. On the placemats, feature pictures of children engaged in learning activities or listings of some of your "reasons for pride." Ask the restaurants to contribute toward their printing.

Piggy-back on local events

Your schools and students can share the community limelight and the fun, and it doesn't cost a cent. Every community has its annual local traditions and festivities. Next year, go to the organizers and offer to coordinate a theme-related activity in the schools. Essay and art contests with publicity for the student winners are easy ways to get involved.

Try a graduate guarantee

If one of your problems is a lack of public confidence, if you believe your schools are actually doing a good job, and if you have an adult education program in place, you might want to consider guaranteeing your graduates. One Michigan district has a guarantee that states: "If you hire a graduate and find that he or she lacks the basic skills in reading, spelling, writing or arithmetic needed to learn and perform satisfactorily on the job, we'll take that graduate back." "Returned" graduates are offered free courses through the adult education program.

Help teachers report the good news

I use something I call "Positive Postcards." They are probably cheaper, and definitely more attractive, than the time-honored happy-gram. Use a clip art, cartoon figure on the front left of the postcards. Add an upbeat caption and leave room at the right for a personal "good news" message from the teacher. Print the school district's return address under the words "Good news from..." on the back. Teachers need only write a short message, address the card, and drop it in the mail. Sheer convenience and availability make the postcards popular among teachers. With parents, it's the message that counts.

Send home a summer learning calendar

Livonia Public Schools in Michigan produces a summer learning calendar to hang on the wall or refrigerator. For each day during July and August, there is a boxed area containing either a description of a learning activity or an illustration to be matched to a description of a more lengthy activity in an accompanying booklet. The children can color the illustrations on both the calendar and the booklet. Teachers wrote the featured

(over)

learning activities. This project is inexpensive, educational, and fun, and it keeps education in the minds of parents and students all summer long! For more information, contact Jay Young, (313) 523-9104.

And as for senior citizens...

...Match up senior citizen groups with teachers whose students have a program they would like to perform.

...Offer to help senior citizen groups with their newsletters. Chances are, if you offer to write and edit items and announcements they submit, they'll allow you to include a few "school" stories.

...Deliver school calendars to senior centers and residences. Our school activity calendar featuring student artwork was as big a hit with seniors as it was with parents.

...Keep your retirees involved. Bloomfield Hills Public Schools in Michigan publishes a retirees' newsletter which won an NSPRA Golden Achievement Award. Contact Penny Cambier, (313) 540-9800 for complete information about how she produces and distributes it.

Getting the Word Out

How do I inform thee? Let me count the ways. It's been a while since we devoted an article to summarizing the many ways schools can communicate with parents and other citizens, and thanks to the Westover Magnet School in Stamford, Conn., we've received about as thorough a list as we've seen. Recognizing that because of changing family structures, parents don't have the time to devote to the schools that they used to have, says Janet Shulman Schneider, it's important to redouble efforts to spread information about the school program, promote positive attitudes and increase involvement.

In Westover's case the list adds up to 20. How many can your school count?

1. Friday envelopes--All student work papers and notices are collected all week and sent home on Friday. Parents have to sign the envelope to verify they've received it. No more "lost" papers.

2. Parent handbook--It covers school policies and procedures, and serves as a handy reference to answer frequent parent questions.

3. Monthly calendar--It contains all school activities and events so parents can plan in advance, thus increasing their attendance.

4. Westover World newsletter--This periodical highlights student writing as well as school information. It is sent throughout the system as well as to senior citizen housing developments.

5. Parent information meetings--Focus on specific programs or areas of the curriculum, giving parents greater understanding of their childrens' programs.

6. Team information packets--Each team (a cluster of grade levels) designs and distributes an information packet at the beginning of the school year, including schedules and curriculum units to be covered throughout the year.

7. Informed school secretaries--A special effort is made to keep the secretaries well-informed about school programs and policies.

8. Parent contact sheets--Teachers record their contacts with all parents, and because the school believes a higher proportion of contacts should be pleasant, negative contact is always followed by a positive one.

9. Thursday breakfasts--The principal, teachers, a community member and several families gather weekly for breakfast in a non-threatening setting to get acquainted and share information.

10. Annual Potluck Dinner--Here families can get together in a school activity while meeting other Westover families.

11. Open door policy--Simple enough: Anyone can visit a classroom without an appointment. Just check in at the office.

12. Structure of PTO--With a structure of committees, each has a specific goal for the year, giving many parents the opportunity to participate actively in the organization.

(continued on page 7)

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IT STARTS in the Classroom/May 1987

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Getting the Word Out (cont. from pg. 6)

13. Birthday picture--When a child has a birthday, he or she visits the office where a picture is taken with the principal. The child gets to take the photo home--another positive feeling toward school.

14. Display of every child's work--Children's work is shown throughout the building, giving students a sense of ownership and pride in the school.

15. Orientation meetings--They are held monthly to inform prospective school parents and other community members about the school. Reservations are required.

16. Community performances--Students perform frequently before senior citizen groups, whether in chorus, band or dance troupe. Good PR and experience too.

17. Invitations to showcase performances--Three major productions are held integrating student work in music, dance and physical education. Community organizations, other schools and senior citizen groups are invited to see them.

18. Mirrors--Believing that when students feel good about themselves they will feel good about their school, Westover has installed large mirrors in the main hall. As children pass in the hall, they instinctively smile at their reflection.

19. Early morning gym program--To accommodate the children of parents who must go to work early, the school provides an early morning gym program.

20. Busy Bears--This program, created by a teaching assistant, has first and second graders create holiday crafts for residents of a senior citizen home. The seniors love it, and the children do something for others.

Spotlight on the Curriculum

A curriculum festival has become an annual event in each of the elementary schools in the Palisades District in Bucks County, Pa. The program brings in thousands of parents, neighbors, relatives and friends, many of whom would never visit the schools otherwise.

The purpose of the festival is three-fold, according to elementary supervisor Kay Winters: (1) to bring alive a piece of the curriculum and explore it in depth; (2) to create excitement about learning, and (3) to bring the community inside the schools to share the experience.

This year the theme was Social Studies: Frontiers Old and New and each classroom brought a specific unit to life. Igloos were built, rain forests created, Egyptian masks designed and reports developed, along with performances and displays involving plays, music, paintings and drawings, slide shows and computer programs. There are three sessions in which adults can visit classrooms. Each class presents twice and comes to the all-purpose room to hear a guest speaker. This enables parents with more than one child in school to visit each one. Outside speakers this year included a member of the Leni Lenape tribe, the state's Teacher in Space, and an actor who played the role of Benjamin Franklin.

The evaluation forms submitted by the visitors are full of praise for teachers, children and staff in each school. "Make no mistake," Winters said, "Curriculum Night is a tremendous amount of work for the school staff, but the community payoff is terrific."

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Updating SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES
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SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE

Effective school-community relations

by Carol MacDougall

Teacher strikes. Special education. The tax burden. The AIDS crisis. Public education today is indeed facing many issues warranting thoughtful study, decisions, and adjustments. At the same time public scrutiny and criticism of our school systems are becoming increasingly commonplace.

Public school systems once functioned as sacred entities, bastions of academic training and discipline, providing a constitutionally ensured service for the youth of the nation. Fifty years ago, the public schools were considered sacrosanct institutions with nary a hint of judgment or interference by parents or the general public. Educators received modest financial support but bountiful respect and professional independence in the pursuit of their idealistic dreams and realistic goals. Pressures for expanded curricular offerings were limited primarily to societal demands, particularly from the government and influential national organizations. Parents ventured into the schools only when invited for a prepared program or teacher conference.

Increased involvement

The last two decades have seen a dramatic change in popular attitudes toward the schools. With an increasing concern over the quality of our educational system, parents and the general public have become more aware and more critical of their individual community's school programs. Community members are insisting on accountability of the budgets, programs, and productivity of public schools. The local public wants more information about the schools and what the students are being taught.

As a result, school board members and administrators need to stop and take a good look at how they are perceived by their community—how their decisions and actions are received locally. Effective school-community relations are absolutely essential for the proper understanding and support of public education.

Shirley Clement, former New Jersey State Coordinator for the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) warns, "Because of the various forms of news media, there always will be publicity about the schools. But this publicity will not always include the positive achievements."

Unfortunately, news stories are usually based on the negative—strikes, vandalism, underachievement as shown by test scores, internal turmoil, to name but a few. The burden of assuring that the general public also is made aware of the positive achievements of their local schools rests squarely on the shoulders of the school district itself. Clearly, the public relations aspect of school management warrants the same careful attention and review as any other school program.

Rising taxes and the changing economy are not only factors but are strong motives contributing to this increasingly questioning demeanor. Communities want tangible benefits for their tax dollars and the public vote on school budgets is the only area of public spending in which the community has any voice and can express its opinion regarding public education. The rising costs of public education and the inevitable impact on taxes has increased the need for widespread public financial support of local school systems. School districts have been forced into a position of explaining, defending, and justifying their existence.

School board members and administrators have reacted to this new public demand for information with varying responses, sometimes sincere, occasionally resentful, and oftentimes frustrated. The issue is complicated by a basic fact that most educators suffer from a significant lack of professional training in communications and public relations. Many administrators who recognize the real necessity of effective community relations are ill-prepared to properly plan and launch a school-community relations program.

Too often, a school system's public relations program is limited to last-minute efforts on special issues. One of the most common mistakes made by school systems is to launch a communications program at bond referendum time. The public is not naive and will readily recognize that the school system's motivation stems from the need to secure public support.

School-community relations

The decreased public credibility in the schools is aggravated by inadequate information, "token" public relations programs, and worse, a complete lack of communications due to administrative resistance or naivete.

Public school educators cannot ignore the challenge of the rightful claim by the school community for involve-

continued on page 2

Carol MacDougall is a freelance school policy editor.

continued from page 1

ment and information. The success of public education depends on public support, and this sustenance is contingent on both performance and effective communication.

Advises Clement, "A strong public relations program that inspires public confidence and support in the schools is essential, for a school district can never be totally successful without community support."

If the general public is either uninterested, or worse, has negative attitudes towards a school system, the functioning of the district will suffer. For example, the attitudes of the students will, to a great extent, reflect the apathetic or negative attitudes of their parents which could lead to the financial implication of inadequate support for funding proposals.

The need for effective school-community relations programs must be recognized by everyone involved in education, not just by a few astute leaders. The public entry into the sanctuary of the schools must be greeted with openness and cooperation, not tolerance or hostility.

For a program to be successful, it must be systemwide, coordinated by a central office staff member, but implemented in every school building by every administrator and educator in the district. Good communication requires effective management and cooperation. Most successful school systems place their school-community relations functions at a high priority.

School boards should not fall into the trap of assuming that communications programs are a frill. Such programs may cost money, but they should be measured in terms of the overall size of the budget, district goals and objectives, and the long-term benefits for school and community.

School-community relations often break down when school leaders fail to find out what their local communities really want to know about the schools. Instead of always telling the public, school officials should ask them.

Another dimension of this need for communication involves internal relations—communication among school board members, staff, and students. A well-managed program ensures that all school personnel, not just key administrators, receive inservice training in public relations. Newspaper headlines about board-administration disputes, teacher strikes, and student protests are glaring evidences of the grave inadequacy of existing internal communications systems. Mutual understanding and teamwork must begin within a school district in order to establish a positive hub with which to generate cooperative interaction with the community.

Advises Clement, "Every school district has a continual communications system, whether or not it is planned or apparent. Every day a student returns home from school and relays his impressions of his teacher, the school day, a class trip, or whatever, there is communication about the schools."

The district that does not have a systematic and comprehensive public relations program in place is vulnerable to the dangers of misinterpretation and misinformation.

Establishing a PR program

A good public relations or communications program is never a whitewash for a poor educational program. An effective communications program must be honest and specific, covering what Clement refers to as the triumverate of P's: *problems*, *plans*, and *progress* of the individual school system.

Building renewed confidence in public education must begin at the local school level. John H. Wherry, executive director of NSPRA, offers the following public relations tips for effective school-community communication:

- Establish an open-door visitation policy. Invite parents and community members to school and repeat the invitation often—in newsletters, in parent handbooks, in report card stuffers, by special individual invitation.
- Have a visitors' day for prospective students and their parents—not just for those of an entering class but for those at any level who may be considering attendance at one of your schools. Publicize it well throughout the community.
- Hold a principal's coffee at the school on a regular basis to draw parents and other visitors to the school for informal discussions.
- Encourage visits and participation by nonparents.
- Encourage elementary teachers to summarize the events and classroom progress of the day with their students and urge them to "tell your parents what you learned at school today."
- Hold small, informal neighborhood meetings in the homes of volunteers led by parents or students your staff has briefed to explain special programs, discuss curriculum changes, and answer other questions. These are particularly helpful for parents of the entering class or newcomers to the area.
- Organize a speakers bureau of students and teachers for parent/community group meetings.
- Take classes into the community; band rehearsals or art classes at shopping centers, for example, give the public a first-hand look at how a program works.
- Involve some of the more active parents in helping to evaluate and plan building level programs, such as assembly programs and discussion groups.

In addition, don't forget about the senior citizens in your community. Student performances and special visits to nursing homes and retirement communities can help win the support of this growing segment of our population. They vote, too.

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Board Member Communication: Do's and Don'ts

These tips give board members some rules for effective communication. The chart is excerpted from *Becoming A Better Better Board Member*, (National School Boards Association, $17.95, Direct Affiliate Price, $14.95).

- Set a policy and budget for communication
- Include communication in staff in-service programs
- Follow through on questions and concerns
- Avoid surprises between board members and the superintendent
- Keep professional and other staff members informed
- Don't hastily make or change policy to meet a crisis
- Visit schools regularly
- Conduct an annual attitude survey
- Keep in touch with constituents by phone or mail
- Become part of a speakers bureau for your schools
- Turn people on with your own enthusiasm
- Take random sampling of opinion on "hot" or emerging issues
- Introduce yourself to people at board meetings
- Don't over-react to situations
- Have a regular newsletter to staff, the community, and special groups
- Answer all correspondence
- Keep an "open door" policy
- Be diplomatic
- Keep news clippings of articles on the school system
- Be visible at school and civic events

Use of citizens' committees

With proper planning, the use of citizens' advisory committees can be a fundamental stepping stone to improving school-community relations. Planned and purposeful involvement of dedicated citizens provides essential support and unique perspectives and approaches to school system issues.

Ignoring this citizen base, which frequently includes knowledgeable people whose views and experiences reveal unanticipated insights and solutions, not only limits your problem-solving resources but ultimately could lead to resentment and resistance toward proposals.

Where to begin

Establishing and developing organized, sound, broad-based school-community relations should begin with the following:

- an up-to-date board policy on the district's public relations program;
- a sincere and honest commitment to the program by the school board, staff, and the entire administrative team;
- a commitment to an on-going, year-round program;
- the expectation that all questions from the public will be answered openly and honestly. (Generally speaking, the only areas where there should be any caution are legal, personnel, and individual student issues.);
- the designation of one staff member to coordinate the program in order to ensure its continuity and overall supervision;
- and the use of a variety of communication techniques and tools such as newspapers, school system and local school newsletters, public meetings, and the involvement of "key communicators" in the community.

In essence, a successful school-community relations program must be anticipatory, continuous, honest, and open. It must not focus on achievements while at the same time concealing deficiencies. It must encourage total school and community awareness of the plans, problems, and progress of the schools.

A well-planned, systematic, two-way process of communication between the schools and the community will bring about understanding, acceptance, and support on the part of both the internal and external communities in your school system. The benefits of properly executed efforts will be tangible. ■

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continued from page 4

the scope of their official duties (*Supen*, N.Y. App., 1983). Thus, if the administrator's report to, for example, the board is wrong and even negligent, he is not liable for defamation unless it is shown that his report was actuated by malice.

Other examples

Other stereotypes and myths about legal requirements for teacher evaluation are rife in the profession and are ripe for correction. For example, allegations of discrimination in evaluation based on race, sex, or handicap often are unsuccessful; the plaintiff-evaluatee faces a high burden of proof. Similarly, the belief that courts strictly require validation of teacher evaluation instruments is not at all supported by the case law to date.

As another example, in collective bargaining jurisdictions, the assumption that teacher evaluation must be negotiated and arbitrated is unwarranted; its negotiability, grievability, and arbitrability vary widely depending on state law and local contracts. Similarly overbroad is the notion that the failure to comply strictly with state legislation and regulations specific to evaluation is fatal. For example, in Pennsylvania, which has relatively specific state requirements, school authorities have prevailed over the challenging teachers in 80 percent of the approximately 32 reported court decisions during the past two decades.

Maintain clear purpose

The bottom-line message is *not* that administrators should run roughshod and trample teachers in the evaluation process. Rather, administrators may not use the law as an alibi for evaluation practices that are not effective for instructional improvement and personnel decisions. The law provides administrators with the room to use the maturing "state of the art" of teacher evaluation, which includes establishing collaboration with teachers, linking evaluation instruments to research, building in training and accountability for evaluators, and tying evaluation directly to staff development. ■

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

court view

Watch out for the law when evaluating teachers!

by Perry A. Zirkel

Shifting enrollments, tightening budgets, and the push for educational reform have increased public and professional attention to teacher evaluation. Researchers and practitioners have recognized that limitations in the time and training of evaluators—and in the instruments and procedures for evaluation—make this area vulnerable to criticism and attack. Inasmuch as negative ratings may lead to discipline, reassignment, or dismissal, legal action is not a mere theoretical possibility.

The law is often an excuse for teacher evaluation being reduced to what Guthrie and Willower called "ceremonial congratulations." In a recent study in Pennsylvania, for example, Langlois and Colarusso found that over 98 percent of the teachers who were rated on a state-mandated 80-point scale received a perfect score of 80. When school systems that had obtained approval to use an alternate form were included, less than one-quarter of one percent of the teachers were evaluated as unsatisfactory.

Legal foundations

Legal requirements concerning teacher evaluation come from what, on first glance, may appear to be a bewildering array of sources. The federal Constitution mandates freedom of expression, due process, and equal protection of the law. Federal civil rights statutes provide special protections for minority, female, and handicapped teachers among others. State statutes and regulations often spell out requirements for the who and how of teacher evaluation. And local policies and contracts may well add further restrictions. Beleaguered and defensive administrators may be overcome with fear or frustration, resulting in paralysis or ritualistic practice that does not provide the intended basis for instructional improvement or personnel decision making.

A review of the case law, however, reveals a wide margin for administrative discretion. Courts tend to defer to the judgment of school authorities in matters of professional expertise, such as teacher evaluation, according them a presumption of good faith and reasonableness. Examination of the common characterizations of the law against the actual, applicable legal precedents is important.

Student performance

"Student test scores may not be part of the basis for teacher evaluation that leads to dismissal." Not so.

Both the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals (*Schwalbaum*, 1973) and the Minnesota Supreme Court (*Whalen*, 1982) have upheld termination of teachers based in part on test scores. A more recent decision (*St. Louis*, 1987) was less conclusive. Although using student test scores as the sole basis for teacher evaluation would certainly be suspect, their use as part of a comprehensive evaluation system would generally appear more likely than not to be upheld by the courts.

Evaluation for improvement

"Providing specific suggestions and extensive time for improvement is judicially regarded as an essential element of teacher evaluation." Again, not quite so.

In cases where state statute or local contracts provide this specific requirement, the court will tend to uphold it (*Wilt*, W. Va., 1982; *Board of Educ.*, Ill. App., 1980); *Merrymaking*, Me., 1976). However, with some exceptions (*Perron*, Mich. App., 1987), courts will not generally impose such a requirement as a matter of law.

First Amendment rights

"Courts will not uphold dismissals based on evaluations that were affected by the outspokenness of the teacher-evaluatee." Again, an overstatement.

Courts will not sustain the First Amendment defense of a teacher whose outspokenness was directed at intra-school or intra-district, not public, issues. Even if the issues are of legitimate community concern, the teacher will not be protected if (1) the resulting friction in school operations outweighs the weight of the public issues, (2) his speaking out was not a substantial or motivating factor for the dismissal, or (3) he would have been terminated regardless of this outspokenness.

Thus, although teachers have successfully passed these hurdles in some cases (*Hinkle*, 7th Cir., 1984; *Eckerd*, D. Del., 1979), they have lost their share of such First Amendment cases (*Foreman*, La. App., 1978; *Knarr*, 7th Cir., 1972).

Defamation threats

"Administrators are wide open to defamation suits if they communicate negative teacher evaluations to others as part of their responsibilities." Another example of "mythful" thinking.

As courts have made clear (*Manquso*, Cal. App., 1984; *Buckner*, Tex. App., 1981), administrators generally have a qualified immunity for reporting evaluation results to others, unless their communication is to persons beyond

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Tips 'n Techniques

How are your school/press relations?

Even the best school system or school board member depends on publicity—usually newspapers—to communicate with citizens. Accurate and balanced news reporting must be a high priority for school officials. Community support for education is based on the quality of the product as well as the public image of the school system.

But it just does not happen. Scheduling and conducting meetings, announcements, and the general availability of school officials can contribute to quality news coverage.

Tired of grousing about biased, incomplete, and inaccurate stories? Ready for reporters to write some good school news instead of just searching for the bad? Whatever the editorial position of a newspaper, the thoroughness of the coverage largely depends on the relationship between the reporter and school officials.

Who speaks for the board?

School board members can speak for their constituents but not for other board members. Prudent members will avoid criticizing fellow board members. In discussing a school board matter with a reporter, stick to the issues—and avoid personalities or past vendettas. (News articles will always lead with the controversy, sometimes at the expense of the more important issues, if given the chance.) Defer to the school superintendent or staff person on administrative matters.

How to handle reporters

For successful press relations, take the initiative with reporters. Tell them your schedule, especially the best times to reach you by phone, both at home and work.

Find out their background. Talk about yours. Open up the lines of communication and reporters will be able to quote you more accurately and fairly.

Find out the newspaper deadlines. Be available for photographs and prepare copies of speeches or announcements. Reporters may be able to give you valuable information, so ask questions! Find out which editor writes the editorials on education so you know who to call to air a concern.

Be prepared for the "tough" question. Take time to develop your thoughts on the issues facing your school district. Be thoughtful, but make sure the reporter does not interpret hesitancy as an effort to dodge the issue.

Try to give information during meetings and interviews in an easy-to-write and quotable style. Use language the reporter and community can understand. Avoid educational jargon.

Most importantly, never lose control, no matter how provocative or infuriating the question. As public officials, school board members set an example for the community.

Staff liaison

Even small school districts benefit from a staff liason charged with press relations. Having one primary contact person minimizes the chance of inaccurate reporting and wasted time spent trying to get information.

Send news releases, meeting schedules, and press conference notices well in advance. Newspapers thrive on current and future news, not an event that occurred three weeks ago. Include school newsletters and other information in press packets to keep reporters up to date with local education.

Check on the reporter's satisfaction with the community relations/press liaison. Also get feedback from staff on reporter accuracy and thoroughness. As the crucial link between the community and its schools, board members should be aware of problems before they receive the complaints.

The newspaper business

Do not always blame the reporter for the story that appears in print. Most newspapers have two or more editors who review articles prior to their publication.

Give feedback. Tell the reporter if you were misquoted or a position was ignored. Try to resolve any problems directly with the reporter. Contact the editor or publisher only as a last resort. But remember to praise a well-written and fair article. Take the time to call a reporter after reading an especially good or bad story. If you wait to react until the next time you are called for a quote, the article in question may be old news and stale for the reporter.

Few things can infuriate school officials more than a story's lead or headline. Either can distort instead of clarify the subject at hand. Take issue with it, but live with it, and hope the article provides the context and explanation. Editors and publishers, not the reporters, usually set the style for these attention-grabbers.

Reporters vie for scoops or exclusives, but savvy school officials let them dig it out. Give all competing newspapers fair and equal consideration. Reward a favorite reporter with praise, not inside information.

"Off the record" remarks are often standard fare of reporter/school official communication. Use them sparingly, if at all. Unless you are sure of a reporter's trustworthiness, it is risky. A legitimate question deserves a quotable answer.

Practical tips

Reporters' dispositions can affect both their accuracy and outlook on education. Try to make the environment at meetings as pleasant as possible with designated seating, paper and pens, and good lighting. Consider these practical tips:

- Have nameplates in front of school board members and administrators for easy identification of speakers.
- Speak clearly and slowly. Stay near the microphone without leaning back in a chair. Speak loudly if there are no microphones.

The bottom line is: Help each other to promote schools in your community. ■

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TABLE OF EXCUSES

To save time for management and yourself, please give your excuses by number. This list covers most situations.

1. That's the way we've always done it.
2. I didn't know you were in a hurry for it.
3. That's not in my department.
4. No one told me to go ahead.
5. I'm waiting for an O.K.
6. How did I know this was different?
7. That's his job, not mine.
8. Wait 'til the boss comes back and ask him.
9. I forgot.
10. I didn't think it important.
11. I'm so busy I just can't get around to it.
12. I thought I told you.
13. I wasn't hired to do that.
14. When in doubt throw it out.
15. I'm new here.

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NSPRA Code of Ethics

The educational public relations professional shall:

I. **Be guided constantly by pursuit of the public interest through truth, accuracy, good taste, and fairness -**

- **following good judgment in releasing information**
- **not intentionally disseminating misinformation or confidential data**
- **avoiding actions which lessen personal, professional or organizational reputation**

II. **Give primary loyalty to the employing organization, insisting on the right to give advisory counsel in accordance with sound public relations ideas and practices -**

- **cooperating with other groups while avoiding conflicts with primary responsibilities**
- **objecting to untenable or unethical policies and activities**

III. **Be aware of personal influence, avoiding promises or granting of unprofessional advantages to others -**

- **refraining from accepting special considerations for influence on organizational decisions**
- **refraining from unauthorized use of organizational facilities, resources or professional services for personal gain or for promotion of the candidacy of aspirants for elected offices.**

IV. **Recognize that effectiveness is dependent upon integrity and regard for ideas of the profession -**

- **not misrepresenting professional qualifications**
- **giving credit for ideas and words borrowed from others**
- **cooperating with professional colleagues to uphold and enforce this Code.**

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